



A Program Guide to Nebraska's Step Up to Quality Standards, Rating and Improvement System



July 29, 2014

To: Nebraska's Child Care and Early Education Programs and Professionals

Step Up to Quality Programs and Providers

Nebraska Step Up to Quality is a result of the Nebraska law passed by the State Legislature in June 2013. The "Step Up to Quality Child Care Act" provides for a statewide early childhood quality rating and improvement system (sometimes called QRIS). The law also requires the Nebraska Department of Education to develop an "Early Childhood Professional Record System," where important information will be stored about your participation in Step Up to Quality as well as participation in required licensing training.

Nebraska Step Up to Quality is intended to improve quality in child care and early education programs and increase positive child outcomes based on research and scientific evidence. In the *Step Up to Quality Program Guide*, you will find information necessary to help you identify where you are doing well in quality improvement as well as identify areas that could be made better in the care you provide for young children, ages birth to kindergarten entrance.

Many years of early childhood research studies and evaluation efforts have shown that high quality early care and education programs make a positive difference in the lives of young children. Your interest and commitment in quality improvement through participation in Step Up to Quality will have a positive impact on young children! It will also make parents and family members, community leaders, and the general public more aware in understandable ways of what quality is in early childhood.

Thank you for your commitment and dedication to Nebraska's young children and their families. Together, we can all make a difference in child care and early education program quality.

Respectfully,

**Nebraska Department of Health and
Human Services**

/s/_____
Kerry Winterer, CEO

/s/_____
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Nebraska Department of Education

/s/_____
Matthew Blomstedt, Commissioner

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Overview of Nebraska Step Up to Quality

Step Up to Quality is Nebraska's Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). "The Step Up to Quality Child Care Act" was established in Nebraska law, June 2013; Neb. Rev. Stat. The purpose of the Step Up to Quality Child Care Act is to:

- provide a path to higher quality for child care and early childhood education programs,
- improve child development and school readiness outcomes,
- provide parents a tool by which to evaluate the quality of child care and early childhood education programs, and
- provide accountability for public funds invested in child care and early childhood education programs.

The *Nebraska Step Up to Quality Program Guide* provides information for programs about the Steps of quality, supports available for child care and early childhood education programs, a glossary of terms used in the standards and links to additional resources related to the standards.

For more information about participating in Step Up to Quality, contact the Step Up to Quality office by phone: 844-807-5712 (toll free) or email: nde.stepuptoquality@nebraska.gov. Additional information is available on the web at <http://www.education.ne.gov/StepUpToQuality/index.html>

Quality Rating and Improvement System

A Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is a defined set of supports and resources to help early childhood programs improve quality. A QRIS includes:

- 1) standards of quality that apply to all early childhood programs,
- 2) supports and incentives for programs meeting the quality standards,
- 3) a review process to make sure programs meet the standards, and
- 4) a rating system that helps parents and the community identify and choose quality early childhood programs.

Step Up to Quality is designed to support all child care and early childhood education programs that participate. Child care and early childhood education programs include:

- Family Child Care Homes and child care centers
- Head Start and Early Head Start programs
- Public school operated early childhood programs
- Community preschools.

Step Up to Quality has five steps that can help child care and early childhood education programs reach their highest potential and realize financial rewards and recognition for being high quality. A set of

resources has developed to support early childhood programs work to improve quality and help children grow and learn.

Resources that will support early childhood programs move up the steps of quality include:

- **Program Guide:** Start with a guide that outlines the five steps to quality and positive results for Children.
- **Coach:** Each program will have the option to work with a coach to move up the steps of quality.
- **Dollars:** Have the opportunity to apply for scholarships for staff education or credentials, and grant dollars to purchase materials that enhance the environment and help children learn.
- **Incentive Bonuses:** Earn an incentive bonus when the program is rated at Step 2, Step 3, Step 4, and Step 5.
- **Recognition:** Receive certificates and recognition for achieving improved quality and celebrate moving up the Steps of Quality.

Participation in Step Up to Quality

Most child care and early childhood education programs can voluntarily participate in Step Up to Quality. There are a few programs that are required to participate in Step Up to Quality due to the amount of funding they receive to provide services to children on child care assistance.

Programs Required to Participate

Participation is required for programs receiving child care subsidy dollars according to the chart below.

Required to participate	Amount of subsidy	Federal Fiscal Year
2014	Over \$500,000	2011-2012
2015	Over \$250,000	2011-2012
2016	Over \$250,000	In preceding fiscal year

All programs **must apply** to participate in Step Up to Quality. Each location (unique address) must apply separately, so a program may have several locations participating in Step Up to Quality.

Support for Programs to Participate

The Nebraska Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services understand that quality improvement depends on the amount of support available. The two state agencies are committed to helping programs move up the steps of quality. Some of the supports available include:

Professional Development and Training

Child care and early childhood education programs have access to many professional development opportunities. Some are provided at no cost; other training has a registration fee. Training opportunities include:

- Safe with You
- Management Training
- Getting Down to Business
- Early Learning Guidelines
- Environment Rating Scales (ERS)
- Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS)

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Nebraska Scholarships

A limited number of T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Scholarships are available through the Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children. The scholarships will assist professionals working toward:

- a certificate or diploma
- Associate degree in early childhood education
- Bachelor degree in early childhood education

Coaching

Coaching is an evidence based practice that helps a program identify and maximize the strengths. A coach can help with goal setting and planning to assist in the Step Up to Quality process. Here are some key questions a coach may ask:

- What does the program want to accomplish?
- What has the program tried so far? How has it worked?
- What options do the program staff see for going forward?
- What input do you want from a coach?
- What is the programs plan for moving up the steps?
- How can the coach best support your program?

Coaching is popular because programs and individuals have found how important it is to have someone to support them in their work. It makes the work more fun and individuals and programs with a coach are more effective in their job.

Programs are not required to have a coach. However, programs generally find that is very beneficial to work with a coach. Some of the benefits include:

- An early childhood expert who can clarify the Step Up to Quality process.
- An objective early childhood professional who can provide encouragement to the program staff as they work towards the goals.
- An experienced coach offers suggestions to programs so they can assess their own quality and are confident and comfortable about the onsite observation.

A coaching assessment interview will occur at the beginning of Step 2 to determine the program's interest in working with a coach. The NDE Step Up to Quality Office will work with programs to assign a coach to the program. A coach will be assigned if the program shows an interest in having someone work by their side as the program moves up the steps of quality.

When a coach is assigned to the program, the coach will help with:

- Quality Improvement Plans
- Strategies for improving learning environments
- Improving teacher/child interactions

Financial Support for Child Development Associate

Limited funds are available to assist early childhood professionals who want to apply for a Child Development Associate (CDA). The CDA is a nationally recognized credential for early childhood professionals. There are many steps involved in receiving a CDA from the National Council on Professional Recognition. The funds help pay the fee for the initial assessment or renewal fee. Scholarships are available through the NDE Office of Early Childhood.

Financial Support for Program Accreditation

Limited funds are available to help programs pay part of the costs for recognized national accreditation. Financial assistance is available through the NDE Office of Early Childhood.

Quality Grants

A limited number of grants are available to assist child care programs working to improve the quality of care provided to children. Grants are available through the DHHS Division of Children and Families.

Incentive Bonuses

Programs that move up a step on Step Up to Quality are eligible to receive an incentive bonus. Incentive bonuses begin when the program achieves Step 2 and continue as programs achieve Steps 3, 4, and 5.

Child Care Subsidy Tiered Reimbursement

If the Child Care Program accepts Child Care Subsidy reimbursement, they will abide by the provisions governed in Nebraska Administrative Code (NAC) Title 392. The Child Care Program will also comply with the terms and conditions of their Child Care Provider Agreement (CC-9B) with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

The rate of reimbursement paid by the Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) to providers who receive Child Care Subsidy is determined by the results of a Market Rate Survey (MRS) of child care providers in the state. A MRS measures the price that child care providers charge to private pay families in a given child care market (such as; various counties in Nebraska). DHHS then adjusts the reimbursement rate for providers that receive Child Care Subsidy based on the findings from the MRS. The reimbursement rate is adjusted every odd-numbered year based on the findings of the most recent MRS. Nationally accredited child care providers may be reimbursed at higher rates. Recent law changes also state that applicable child care or early childhood education programs, who are participating with Step Up to Quality and have received a Step 3 or higher, may also be reimbursed at a higher rate using the Step Up to Quality Rating Scale. The reimbursement rate is increased each time a provider moves up a step, starting when the provider moves from a Step 2 to a Step 3.

Providers who receive Child Care Subsidy and participate with Step Up to Quality will receive an increase of 5% to their subsidy rates once they reach Step 3 and will receive an additional 5% increase for each additional step achieved, through Step 5. Since nationally accredited providers are already receiving a higher rate, they will automatically enter into Step Up to Quality as a Step 3 and will not receive a rate increase at this level. Nationally accredited providers will receive a 5% increase once they achieve Step 4 and another 5% increase once they achieve Step 5. The Step Up to Quality Rating Scale will be adjusted every odd year in accordance with the most recent MRS which will allow DHHS to continue to provide rates that are consistent with the current market in all areas of the state.

Step 1

Apply for Step Up to Quality

Programs must complete the requirements listed below. The Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System is an online system accessed at <http://ecrecords.education.ne.gov>

- The director (licensee/owner) completes a program application in the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System.
- The director (licensee/owner) agrees to and signs the Step Up to Quality Release Statement.
- Each staff member in the program completes a personal professional record in the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System. Each staff member must have an individual email address.
- The director (licensee/owner) or family child care home primary provider completes the Step Up to Quality Orientation.

The professional record information includes:

- contact information
- education
- training completed
- credentials
- wages
- current and prior work experience

Note: If a staff person has completed some college courses, transcripts will need to be uploaded to the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System or sent to the NDE Step Up to Quality office .

The program application information includes:

- program contact information
- site information including address and number of classrooms
- benefits provided to staff
- number of children served
- rates charged for children of a certain age
- whether the program is serving children with special needs
- whether the program provides transportation to home or to schools

Step Up to Quality Rating

Licensed child care programs completing all requirements will be awarded a rating at Step 1 and may begin to work toward Step 2.

Head Start programs, recognized nationally accredited early childhood programs, and public school district approved early childhood education programs completing all requirements will be awarded a rating at Step 3.

STEP 2

When programs begin working toward Step 2, they should first contact the NDE Step Up to Quality office for a Coach Interest Questionnaire. After completing the Coach Interest Questionnaire, programs complete the requirements listed below.

Center-Based program director/owner or designee completes the following training		Family Child Care Home licensee/owner completes the following training	
Safe with You Series	4 hours	Safe with You Series	4 hours
Early Learning Guidelines Domain Series	42 hours	Early Learning Guidelines Domain Series	42 hours
Management Training Program	45 hours	Getting Down to Business	20 hours
Orientation to Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC)	20 minutes	Orientation to Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC)	20 minutes
AND		AND	
Submit the NAP SACC Pre Self-Assessment covering all 5 areas – nutrition, physical activity, outdoor play, screen time, and infant feeding/breastfeeding		Submit the NAP SACC Pre Self-Assessment covering all 5 areas – nutrition, physical activity, outdoor play, screen time, and infant feeding/breastfeeding	

Directors/Owners/Licensees (Child Care Centers and Preschools), licensees (Family Child Care Home I), and primary provider (Family Child Care Home II) who have previously completed the Early Learning Guidelines Domain Training Series, Management Training Program, or Getting Down to Business do not need to retake the series provided the training can be verified through the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System at the NDE Early Childhood Training Center.

Step Up to Quality Rating

Licensed child care programs completing all requirements will be awarded a rating at Step 2 and may begin to work toward Steps 3, 4 and 5.

Step Up to Quality Incentive Bonus

With a rating at Step 2, licensed child care programs are eligible for an incentive bonus.

Step 3 – 4 – 5

Programs wanting to work toward Steps 3-5 must first indicate that intent to the NDE Step Up to Quality office. Programs need to designate a lead person who is responsible for ensuring that all requirements are met.

Programs must select at least one observation scale, either the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) **OR** the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and complete the required training for that scale.

- If the program selects the ERS, the required training is *Introduction to the ERS*.
- If the program selects CLASS, the required training is *CLASS Introduction*.

Programs are encouraged to also attend training about Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC), and to develop and implement a program improvement plan based on the results of a self-assessment using the ERS, CLASS, and/or NAP SACC. A coach will be very helpful to assist programs with program improvement plans.

Earning Points

The program rating for Steps 3-5 is determined by the number of points the program earns during an independent observation and by review of the quality indicators defined for Steps 3-5. Program must earn at least 1 point in each standard area. Programs must earn at least 30 points in order to be rated at Step 3.

Points Needed	Rating
30 – 50 points earned	Step 3
51 – 79 points earned	Step 4
80 – 100 points earned	Step 5

Programs submit documentation and have an onsite visit to verify that indicators are met.

- Programs must earn at least one point in each standard area.
- Programs can choose within each standard area which points to focus on.
- Programs will be given full points for meeting the quality indicator. If the quality indicator is not met, no points are earned.
- Programs must earn at least 30 points to be rated at Step 3 or higher.
- Programs can strategically focus on indicators within the standards that will earn points immediately, and then add additional points as they work on other indicators within the standards.

- Programs must select one of the observation tools to include in the Step 3 – 5 Rating. Select either the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) or Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).
- Points are earned based on information the program provides as verified by a rater and the scores of the program observation tool.
- Programs can earn points for both completions of a certificate program or formal education of the director and staff, and for ongoing in-service training hours completed annually. Points are earned for the highest level of education achieved, not for all levels of education achieved.
- Programs earn points based upon the education and ongoing training of directors and teaching staff in this standard area.
- All education is verified through the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System. Programs are responsible for ensuring that all staff information is current.

Getting Ready for Rating

Programs need to:

- Complete the *Step Up to Quality Rating Readiness* tool found on the Step Up to Quality website <http://www.education.ne.gov/StepUpToQuality/index.html>,
- Complete the Application for Onsite Observation and Review, and
- Send both documents to the NDE Step Up to Quality Office for a visit to be scheduled.

The Step Up to Quality office will assign a rater and observer to visit the program based upon the program's application for an observation and review visit.

Some quality indicators will be verified through a review of:

- paperwork
- training records
- educational records
- policies and procedures

Other quality indicators will require an onsite observation by an observer and/or quality rater.

- Observers visit family child care homes, and center-based classrooms to directly view the environment and teacher/child interactions using either the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) and/or the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) assessments.
- The observer and rater will be a person not already associated with the program.

Rating Cycle

A program may request an observation of ERS or CLASS once a year if they believe they are ready to move up a step. Otherwise, programs will be reviewed as noted in the chart below.

Step	Rating Cycle
3	Every two years
4	Every two years
5	Every five years

Please note: Coaches assigned to a child care or early childhood education program will not be the person observing or rating the program. The role of coaches is to help the director and teaching staff achieve and maintain a high level of quality.

Documentation

Programs will provide documentation to determine whether the program meets the requirements of each indicator. Programs must complete the rating readiness tool to clarify for raters/observers which indicators the program is opting out of for the rating/observation process.

Documentation may include, but is not limited to:

- ✚ Child files
- ✚ Child portfolios
- ✚ Parent handbook
- ✚ Program policies
- ✚ Staff handbooks/policies and procedures
- ✚ Documentation of staff orientation
- ✚ Staffing plans
- ✚ Lesson plans
- ✚ Daily schedules
- ✚ Curriculum plans/activity matrix
- ✚ Copies of completed child developmental screening forms
- ✚ Copies of completed child assessments
- ✚ Newsletters
- ✚ Facility website
- ✚ Notes from family conferences or meetings with families
- ✚ Information posted in family resource area/library/classrooms/bulletin boards/resource binder
- ✚ Minutes and agendas from staff meetings
- ✚ Minutes and agendas from IEP/IFSP meetings

Note: To determine points for the Professional Development and Training standard, training hours, credit hours, credentials, and educational records of the program teaching staff, director, licensee, or primary providers will be verified by reviewing the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System.

Step Up to Quality Rating

Based on the number of points earned by meeting the quality standards, the child care or early childhood education program will be awarded a rating at Steps 3, Step 4 or Step 5.

Incentive Bonus

At the completion of Steps 3, 4 and 5, the child care or early childhood education program is eligible for an incentive bonus. Programs who automatically begin at Step 3 are not eligible for an incentive bonus until they have moved up at least one step.

Child Care Subsidy Reimbursement

At the completion of Steps 3, 4 and 5, licensed child care program or early childhood programs who accept children on subsidy may receive a higher rate.

Quality Standards and Indicators

Quality Standards are global areas that are important to program quality. Global standards are based upon researched practices that are linked to improved children's learning and development. The Nebraska Step Up to Quality Standards for Steps 3-5 are:

Quality Standards	Possible Points
Program Curriculum, Learning Environments, and Interactions	
Classroom/FCC Home Environment	56 Points
Curriculum, Learning and Staff Support	10 Points
Child Outcomes	9 Points
Professional Development and Ongoing Training	11 Points
Family Engagement and Partnerships	6 Points
Program Administration	8 Points
Total Possible Points	100 Points

These standards were identified by the Nebraska Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services as evidence of high quality because programs:

- regularly assess children's skills, strengths and needs,
- actively promote the optimal health of children,
- select and implement developmentally appropriate learning activities that address all domains of learning for young children,
- adapt learning activities to meet the needs of individual children within the home or center-based program,
- actively engage children in everyday learning,
- have knowledgeable, effective, and professional staff who pursues lifelong learning,
- engage with families to help support children's learning and development,
- follow sound administrative practices for selecting and guiding staff and substitutes, and
- follow sound business practices for managing the income, expenses and facility maintenance requirements.

Each quality standard is made up quality indicators which describe specific expectations and/or measures of quality. The standards and indicators provide measures for ensuring high quality practices are demonstrated in child care and early childhood education programs in Nebraska.

Quality Standard 1: Program Curriculum, Learning Environment and Interaction (66 Possible Points)

1A: Classroom/FCC Home Environment (56 Possible Points)

Quality Indicator	Why is this indicator important?	Points
Training		
The program lead designee attends the training <i>Introduction to the Environment Rating Scale</i>	To understand the Environment Rating Scale observation scale, the subscales, and how the scale is scored.	1
The program lead designee attends the training <i>Practice Using the Environment Rating Scale</i>	To understand detailed information on the areas ERS measures and how the measures are scored.	1
The program lead designee attends the training <i>Introduction to the CLASS</i>	To understand the Classroom Assessment Scoring Scale (CLASS), the domains and dimensions and how they are scored.	1
The program lead designee attends the training <i>CLASS Observation</i>	This more detailed training on the CLASS will help programs understand how this observation scale is scored.	1
The program lead designee completes the <i>NAP SACC Training</i>	The Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) is an evidence-based program that measures best practices in the areas of child nutrition and physical activity. The training will help early childhood programs understand what the NAP SACC best practices are and to prepare for the assessment in their program.	1
Quality Improvement Plan Based on Self-Assessment		
The program lead designee completes a Quality Improvement Plan based upon the ERS self-assessment.	The quality improvement plan completed by programs following an ERS self-assessment helps programs (with help from the quality coach, if applicable) focus on changes the program plans to make.	2
The program lead designee completes a Quality Improvement Plan based upon CLASS self-assessment.	The quality improvement plan completed by programs following a CLASS self-assessment helps programs (with help from the quality coach, if applicable) focus on changes the program plans to make.	2
The program lead designee completes an Action Planning Document based upon the NAP SACC Pre Self-Assessment	The Action Planning Document completed by programs following a NAP SACC Pre Self-Assessment helps the program (with help from the quality coach, if applicable) focus on changes the program plans to make.	2
Observations		
Environment Rating Scale (ERS) Observation Three ERS Scales may be used:	In order to provide care and education that will permit children to experience a quality of life while helping them develop their abilities, a quality	

<p>Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R) for children from birth to 2 and ½ years of age.</p> <p>Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) for preschool-kindergarten aged children, from ages 2 through 5 years of age.</p> <p>Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised (FCCERS-R) for family child care home programs.</p> <p>ERS items are scored on a 1-7 continuum with 7 considered excellent and 1 considered inadequate.</p>	<p>program must provide for the three basic needs all children have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of their health and safety • Building positive relationships • Opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience <p>No one component is more or less important than the others, nor can one substitute for the other. It takes all three to create a quality program. The environment rating scales include each of these three basic components of quality which are observed in the program's environment, curriculum, schedule and interactions.</p>	
	Average Score	Points
Program Overall	Average Score 3.5-4.49	3
	Average Score 4.5-5.49	6
	Average Score 5.5 and higher	9
Subscale Name	Average Subscale Score	Points
Personal Care Routines	Average Subscale Score 4.0-4.9	1
	Average Subscale Score 5.0-5.9	2
	Average Subscale Score 6.0 & higher	3
Activities	Average Subscale Score 4.0-4.9	1
	Average Subscale Score 5.0-5.9	2
	Average Subscale Score 6.0 & higher	3
Language and Reasoning (ECERS-R) Listening and Talking (ITERS-R and FCCERS-R)	Average Subscale Score 4.0-4.9	1
	Average Subscale Score 5.0-5.9	2
	Average Subscale Score 6.0 & higher	3

For Center-Based programs at least 30 percent of groups (classrooms) of children will be randomly selected for observation. At least one group (classroom) will be selected from each age group.

<p>Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)</p> <p>Three CLASS Observation tools may be used: CLASS Infant CLASS Toddler CLASS PreKindergarten (PreK)</p> <p>CLASS items are scored on a 1-7 continuum with 6-7 considered high, 3-5 medium, and 1-2 low.</p>	<p>CLASS measures the quality of interactions between teachers and children. In preschool, more effective teacher-child interactions may be associated with higher scores in vocabulary and math, which are key skills for children about to enter kindergarten. More effective interactions may be associated with gains in social competence and lower behavior problems.</p>	
	Average Score	Points
Program overall Average Score	Average Score 3.5-4.9	3
	Average Score 5.0-5.9	6
	Average Score 6.0 & higher	9

CLASS Domains	Average Domain Score	Points
Engaged Support for Learning (Toddler) Instructional Support (PreK)	Average Domain Score 2.0-3.4	1
	Average Domain Score 3.5-4.9	2
	Average Domain Score 5.0 and higher	3
Responsive Caregiving (Infant) Emotional and Behavioral Support (Toddler) Emotional Support (PreK)	Average Domain Score 4.0-4.9	1
	Average Domain Score 5.0-5.9	2
	Average Domain Score 6.0 & higher	3
Classroom Organization (PreK)	Average Domain Score 4.0-4.9	1
	Average Domain Score 5.0-5.9	2
	Average Domain Score 6.0 & higher	3

For Center-Based programs at least 30 percent of groups (classrooms) of children will be randomly selected for observation. At least one group (classroom) will be selected from each age group.

NAP SACC Post Self- Assessment Results	<p>Childhood obesity has become an important issue in early childhood. NAP SACC is intended to help early care and education programs develop quality practices that will prevent childhood obesity. Obese children may experience immediate health consequences, which can lead to weight-related health problems in adulthood.</p> <p>Healthy nutrition and physical activity helps promote health and learning in young children.</p>		
	Post Self-Assessment Results		Points
	Breastfeeding and Infant Feeding Policy and Practices =Total of 22 best practices	7 – 11 Best Practices	1
		12 – 15 Best Practices	2
		16 – 22 Best Practices	3
	Nutrition Policy and Practices =Total of 44 best practices	13 – 22 Best Practices	1
		23 – 31 Best Practices	2
		32 – 44 Best Practices	3
	Physical Activity and Screen Time Policy and Practices =Total of 54 Best Practices	16 – 27 Best Practices	1
		28 – 38 Best Practices	2
		39 – 54 Best Practices	3

1B: Curriculum and Staff Supports (10 Possible Points)

Quality Indicator	Why is this indicator important?	Points
The program utilizes an evidence-based/developmentally appropriate curriculum	A curriculum includes goals for children and families, the experiences and materials provided by the program to help children achieve those goals, and how early childhood professionals work together to support children.	2
The program curriculum aligns with the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines	Alignment of the curriculum with the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines helps ensure that all children across age groups and settings receive developmentally appropriate instruction.	2
Lead teaching staff or Family Child Care Home owner are trained on the Program Curriculum	Training to implement the established curriculum helps teaching staff put the learning activities into practice.	2
Lead Teaching Staff or Family Child Care Home owner complete the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines Domain Training Series	Training on the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines help staff provide developmentally appropriate experiences for children.	2
The program provides a curriculum that incorporates nutrition and/or physical activity for children	Children are healthier when they have opportunities for physical activity and the development of gross motor skills and are provided appropriate nutrition.	2

A list of approved curriculum is available on the Step Up to Quality website

Quality Standard 2: Child Outcomes (9 Possible Points)

Quality Indicator	Why is the indicator important?	Points
Developmental screening is conducted within 90 days of a child's enrollment and the results are shared with families.	Early identification of potential developmental delays is critical to help ensure that children get the resources they need to support positive development. Staff knowledgeable about developmental milestones can share information with families to facilitate early identification of developmental delays and help connect families with services and formal evaluation. Some questions to	1

	<p>ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is screening conducted for all children within 90 days of enrollment to identify developmental concerns and determine if a child needs a more formal evaluation? • Is the screening tool reliable and valid? • Are screening results provided to each family? • Does the program share information with families about how to find developmental services when needed? <p>Note: Coaches can help programs identify developmental screening instruments.</p>	
Ongoing assessment of children's strengths and needs are aligned with the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines and are used to develop education plans, monitor progress, and inform instruction.	<p>When programs gather information to learn about each child's progress and needs on a regular basis, they are better able to plan and provide individualized instruction that best supports the child's growth and development. Some questions to ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are both formal and informal assessments used? • Is information about each child's strengths and needs collected and analyzed on an ongoing basis at least three times per year? • How is child assessment information used to inform curriculum and activity planning and to monitor child's progress? <p>Note: Coaches can help programs identify assessment instruments that will work for specific types of programs.</p>	2
The program conducts a periodic review and use of child assessment data for continuous program improvement.	<p>Looking at trends or patterns is a valuable planning tool to support groups of children. This quality indicator examines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are the needs of <i>all</i> children in a group considered when making plans to improve programming? • Are specific action plans in place to address program enhancements? 	2
The program shares individualized child data from ongoing assessments with families.	<p>Informing and involving families in their child's progress and growth supports the child's development both in the program and at home.</p>	1
The program provides evidence of family involvement in the development of transition plans for individual children.	<p>Engaging and involving families in their child's progress, growth and transitions supports the child's development.</p>	1

The program has a procedure in place to meet with community service providers for IFSP and/or IEP planning for children with special needs.	Programs need to support children and work with other early childhood professionals when caring for children with special needs.	1
The program staff participate in IFSP and/or IEP planning for children with special needs.	Programs need to support children and work with other early childhood professionals when caring for children with special needs.	1

Quality Standard 3: Professional Development and Ongoing Training (11 Possible Points)

Importance of this Standard

The early childhood field is dynamic and constantly changing as new knowledge and research become available about young children's brain development. Early childhood caregivers and educators need training and education that support high-quality interaction with children. The most successful early childhood professionals make a commitment to lifelong learning and actively pursue new knowledge as it becomes available.

Note: Family Child Care Home II's will be scored as center-based programs for this section of the standards due to having more than one staff member.

Center Director		Points
CDA or One Year Certificate/Diploma related to ECE from Community College or higher	Level Three of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals	1
Has at least 20 Semester Credit Hours in Early Childhood Education	Level Three of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood providers.	1
AA/AAS in ECE or related field	Level Four of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals	2
BA in ECE or related field	Level Five of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals	3
MA in ECE or related field	Level Six of Nebraska Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals	4
Center Designated Lead Teaching Staff (At least one staff person per classroom must be designated as lead)		
25% have CDA or One Year Certificate/Diploma related to ECE from Community College or higher	Level Three of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals	1
25% have at least 20 semester credit hours in early childhood education	Level Three of Nebraska's Core competencies for Early Childhood providers.	1
25% have AA/AAS or higher in ECE or related field	Level Four of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals	2
25% have BA or higher in ECE or related field	Level Five of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals	3
Center-All Other Teaching Staff (assistants and aides)		
25% have CDA or One Year Certificate/Diploma related to ECE from Community College or higher	Level Three of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals	1
25% have at least 20 semester credit hours in early childhood education.	Level Three of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Providers	1
50% have CDA or One Year Certificate/Diploma related to ECE from Community College or higher	Level Three of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals	2
25% have AA/AAS or higher in ECE or related field	Level Four of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals	3
Family Child Care Provider		
CDA or One Year Certificate/Diploma related to ECE from Community College or higher	Level Three of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals	2
FCCH provider has at least 20 semester credits hours in early childhood education.	Level Three of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals	2
AA /AAS in ECE or related field	Level Four of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals	6
BA in ECE or related field	Level Five of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals	8
MA in ECE or related field	Level Six of Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals	10
Ongoing Professional Development (Both Center-Based and Family Child Care Homes)		
All full-time administrative/teaching staff has at least 24 clock hours of in-service training per calendar year (or 3 semester credit hours of college coursework per calendar year.)	A minimum of 4 clock hours of the 24 clock hours should be in the area of health and safety.	1

Quality Standard 4: Family Engagement and Partnership (6 Possible Points)

Quality Indicator	Why is the indicator important?	Points
The program honors the child's home language and encourages home language development by greeting children who are English Language Learners (ELL) and their families in the home language or using simple phrases from a child's home language in daily communication with the child.	All children need to see themselves and their culture represented in the classroom on a daily basis. Early childhood care and education professionals do not need to be proficient in the child's home language, but by knowing a few terms and phrases and using them with the children and families helps everyone feel welcome.	1
The program provides materials and resources in a way that is accessible to all families including ELL families.	Connections between families, programs and the broader community can result in greater sharing and maximizing of resources. Family resources are most meaningful and best used when they are relevant and in languages represented by the families in the program.	1
The program informs families when there will be a change in teacher or a substitute teacher, when a field trip is planned, when a child will change classrooms.	Families need consistency and stability in the early care and education of their children. Programs may experience turnover, or teachers out due to illness or family emergencies. Programs need to be diligent about informing families when there will be change in caregivers/teachers, or when the child may be transitioning to another classroom or program. Families can help children in making the transition if they are informed.	1
The program has communication strategies for informing families about their children's learning and development.	Early childhood care and education programs need to regularly communicate with families regarding the learning activities occurring in the program.	2
There is a defined procedure for the family to provide feedback to the program.	High quality programs continuously look for ways to improve to better serve children and families. Programs should have a defined formal procedure for gathering family input on suggested ways to improve the program.	1

Quality Standard 5: Program Administration (8 Possible Points)

Quality Indicator	Why is the indicator important?	Points
<p>Center-based programs: The program has procedures for orienting new staff, and assistant(s) to the program. The program has a written staff handbook.</p> <p>Family Child Care Programs: The program has procedures for orienting assistants and/or substitutes to the program including meeting children and families before assuming responsibilities.</p>	<p>Note: Center-based programs and Family Child Care Homes have different indicators for this particular item.</p> <p>High quality programs make sure that new staff and substitutes know the policies and procedures of the program, and the particular curriculum used in the classroom.</p>	1
<p>There are self-assessments or appraisals of teaching staff competencies and professional development plans for improving skills.</p>	<p>High quality programs make sure that teaching staff continue to grow and develop in their knowledge and skills. Programs assess the knowledge and skills of staff and develop plans to improve knowledge and skills through training and education.</p>	1
<p>Center-Based Programs: A written salary scale or a plan for compensation of all teaching staff, substitutes, and assistants in the program is defined and implemented taking into account staff education and years of experience.</p> <p>Family Child Care Programs: A plan for compensation of owners, substitutes and assistants working in the family child care home is defined and implemented taking into account staff education and years of experience.</p>	<p>Note: Center-based programs and Family Child Care Homes have different indicators for this particular item.</p> <p>High quality programs have stable and consistent teaching staff. Programs can help ensure stability in staffing if they provide staff with pay and benefits based upon their education and years of experience.</p> <p>Stability in staffing occurs when programs compensate staff fairly based upon education, training, years of experience and performance.</p> <p>Family Child Care Homes need to continuously evaluate whether they are compensating themselves and their substitutes well based upon their education, training and years of experience.</p>	1
<p>The program has a budget that projects income and expenses annually.</p>	<p>Early childhood care and education programs need to understand what their income and expenses are within the program. Programs that understand their income and expenses annually can ensure that the costs of operation are covered and that the program can be sustained for the long term. Most importantly</p>	1

	the program will be a dependable part of a child's life because its finances are in order.	
The program reports income to the IRS and claims expenses related to the program.	High quality programs operate according to the Internal Revenue Service requirements. By following IRS requirements, programs stay in good standing with federal and state taxes.	1
The program has records to keep track of income and expenses.	High quality programs have record keeping practices to ensure that all income has been received, and details how and when expenses have been paid.	1
The program has a written agreement with the families for hours of operation, days the program is closed, fees, and a fee payment schedule, including late fees.	High quality programs provide families with written information about the programs operations, the fees, hours of operation, closing days, and payment of fees.	1
The program participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.	When programs participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, children served in the program have their daily nutritional needs met.	1

Ratings Grievance Process

The following section outlines the grievance process that Step Up to Quality participants can follow in regards to rating information and necessary steps they must take and what the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) will do to address the grievance.

Eligibility

Programs may pursue one rating grievance per Step Up to Quality rating cycle as noted in the chart below.

Step	Rating Cycle
3	Every two years
4	Every two years
5	Every five years

Purpose of the Rating Grievance Process

Programs may pursue a rating grievance after the receipt of a Step Up to Quality Rating Report for the following reasons:

- The program suspects errors in calculation of points or other technical errors.
- The program claims that their practice at the time of an on-site evaluation should have earned at least one Level higher

The Step Up to Quality Rating Grievance process **does not** address or include the following reasons:

- Additional information gathered by the program *after* on-site evaluation visits.
- Components that the program marked “*opt out*” on the completed *Rating Readiness Tool* provided to the Step Up to Quality technical assistance staff.
- Self-Assessment scores were higher than the official observation score(s).
- ERS and CLASS scores from previous observations were higher than Step Up to Quality observation scores.
- The date/time of on-site visits if the visits occurred during the timeframe provided by the program on their Request for On-Site Evaluation Form including: program hours/days of operation, three month evaluation window requested by program, the program-chosen black-out dates (up to two per month). Visits are rescheduled only when there is a program emergency/natural disaster.
- The selection of classrooms for observations.
- The variability of time spent in classrooms.
- The typical teaching staff was not present during visit.
- The classroom or family child care home had new children, sick children, or an otherwise “non-typical” day, including disruptions to regular schedule.
- Information was not ready for review by raters/observers at the time of on-site visits.
- Programs with licenses that are on probation, suspended or revoked may not file a grievance regarding the rating.

- Professional Development and Training Quality Standard: Concerns about staff education verification must be appealed using the Nebraska Professional Record System existing processes before an on-site evaluation or rating.

Initiating a Rating Grievance

The program must complete the following steps within **30 days** of receipt of the Step Up to Quality Rating Report. All grievances will be handled through this process and will be consistent for all programs.

1. The program director of record must communicate concerns with the Step Up to Quality Director. The Step Up to Quality Director will review the Step up to Quality Standards with the program to address misunderstandings or questions about the general ratings calculations.

This initial step is intended to help programs clarify how ratings are calculated in general based on the Quality Standards, which may prevent the need for rating grievance.

2. If the program still has concerns, the Step Up to Quality Program Director will complete the *Step Up to Quality Rating Grievance Form* and attach detailed **written** information including:
 - A description of why the program practice **at the time of observation or review** should have earned at least one Level higher based on the Step Up to Quality Standards Indicators (e.g. from Step 3 to Step 5).
 - Documentation and evidence of the program practice specific to *each* Quality Standard indicator under dispute.
 - The date(s) of communication with the Step Up to Quality Director.
 - The Step Up to Quality Director will submit completed Step Up to Quality Rating Grievance Form to the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services, Child Care Development Fund Manager.

Grievance Review and Resolution Process

1. Members of the Nebraska Step Up to Quality Steering Committee, which consist of DHHS and NDE will review the program's *Step Up to Quality Rating Appeal Form* and may request additional documentation from the program and/or the Department of Education's Office of Early Childhood Step Up to Quality Program.
2. Members of the Steering Committee will make a decision within 10 business days of receiving all necessary documents and information to make a decision. Written notification of the decision will be sent to the program.
3. If the Rating Grievance is granted:
 - If it is determined that an error was made in calculation, the scores will be adjusted and the program will be issued an updated Rating Report.
 - The program participation status on the Step Up to Quality website will be updated if applicable.
 - In the case that the grievance outcome requires a re-rating, the Steering Committee will contact the Step Up to Quality Director to initiate an on-site evaluation for a re-rating.

Note: *In the case of re-rating due to a founded rating grievance, no new facility documentation or evidence that was not available during original onsite visits will be reviewed.*

4. If grievance is denied:
 - The program will be notified in writing of the decision including information about why the grievance was denied. The program rating will remain valid for two years (if the program is at Step 3-4) from the date the rating was issued.
5. While a program is in process of a rating appeal all Step up to Quality services including coaching and distribution of incentive bonuses will be put on hold until the final rating appeal decision.

Issues That Might Impact a Program Rating

Child Care Licensing

If a participating child care or early childhood education program is at a rating *higher than Step One*, and the program's license is placed on Corrective Action Status, Disciplinary Limitation, Probation, or Suspension, the program shall have its quality scale rating reduced to **Step One**.

If a participating child care or early childhood education program's license is **revoked**, the program will not be eligible to participate in or receive a quality scale rating until the program has been issued an Operating license which is in full force and effect.

If a license revocation action has been initiated, and the program has appealed the action, the license remains in effect and the program may continue to operate until the hearing outcome/decision. The program's Step Level will also remain in effect until the hearing outcome/decision.

If a program has fulfilled the terms of their Corrective Action Status, or their Probationary period or Suspension period has been lifted the program's Step level be *reinstated* to its previous Step rating.

If an Emergency Closing Order has been issued, the program must immediately cease operation. If the program appeals this action, and the action is overturned, the program's Step level is *reinstated* at its *previous* rating.

Child Care Subsidy

If the Department of Health and Human Services terminates a Child Care Subsidy Agreement, the child care program rating will be re-evaluated.

Prekindergarten programs established by a school board or Educational Service Unit per Rule 11

An early childhood education program found in noncompliance with the requirements of Rule 11 may be subject to loss of program approval and/or loss of grant funding. The Commissioner of the Nebraska Department of Education may make recommendations to the State Board of Education to end or deny the program's approval and/or grant funding. Recommendations from the Commissioner to the Board to either end or deny program approval may be appealed.

When the Commissioner makes a recommendation to the Board to end or deny program approval or end grant funding, notice of the recommendation and of the right to request a hearing shall be given by certified mail sent at least thirty (30) calendar days prior to the date of the Board meeting at which the recommendation is to be considered. The early childhood education program's Step Up to Quality Level will be reduced to Step **One** effective the date of this notice.

If the program appeals this action with the Department of Education, the program's Step Level rating will remain at Step **One** pending the outcome of the hearing and Board decision.

Upon review of the Commissioner's recommendation and following any hearing, the Board shall make a determination regarding the program's approval or grant funding, and shall inform the head administrator of the school district or educational service unit, and the presiding officer of the governing body, if known, of the Board's decision. Notice shall be given in writing by certified mail.

- If the results of the hearing and Board decision are to **terminate** the program's approval or grant funding, the program's participation in Step Up To Quality will also be terminated, effective the date of notification.
- If the results of the hearing and Board decision are to **retain/continue** the program's approval or grant funding, the program's Step level will be **reinstated** at the Step level held **prior** to the action, effective the date of notification.

Head Start and Early Head Start

A federally-funded Head Start and Early Head Start grantee must be in good standing with federal and other state or local monitoring systems to participate in Step Up to Quality. Grantees will provide evidence of this good standing to the Step Up to Quality Office at the Nebraska Department of Education within 30 days of receipt of federal monitoring letter. Non-compliances or deficiencies that may impact the quality rating status will be reported to the Step Up to Quality Office no later than 10 business days upon receipt of such notice. The grantee's ongoing participation in Step Up to Quality will be reevaluated by the Steering Committee and response to the grantee will occur within 10 business days of the Steering Committee's decision.

Withdrawing from Step Up to Quality

Required Programs: Withdrawal by any program required to participate in Step Up to Quality risks loss of the child care subsidy agreement and subsequent reimbursement from the Department of Health and Human Services. Withdrawal may also impact the program's child care license.

Voluntary Programs: Any early childhood care and education program not required to participate in Step Up to Quality may withdraw at any time by notifying the Step Up to Quality Program Director in writing. Once withdrawn, programs:

- may not advertise their participation or rating,
- are not eligible for Incentive bonuses or for tiered reimbursement for child care subsidy from DHHS, and
- are also required to return all Step Up to Quality promotion materials.

If the program chooses to reapply to Step Up to Quality at a later time, they will re-enter as a new program and must complete all initial requirements for participating. A program cannot reapply for at least one year.

Glossary

	Definition
Accreditation	National organizations have defined standards of quality for early care and education programs. These quality standards move beyond the minimal standards defined in child care licensing regulations. Nebraska recognizes several national accreditations as high quality. Recognized national accreditation organizations in Step Up to Quality are: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)
Ages and Stages Questionnaire	A developmental screening instrument measures the developmental growth of young children. It is available in both English and Spanish.
Alignment	The arranging of concepts and or standards in a way that is similar or closely matches.
Assessment	A process through which written observations, children's work, stories, photos of children working and anecdotes are gathered in a variety of learning areas over time.
Best Practice	"What works" in a particular situation or environment. Usually defined by data or some research that has determined that it works.
Child Care Subsidy	Federal and state funds that help parents with low incomes pay the cost of child care. The payments go directly to the early childhood care and education program based upon contracts with the program.
Child Data	Refers to standard or defined information gathered about individual children or groups of children.
Child Outcomes	Measure of children's progress in learning and development over time.
Child Portfolio	Samples of children's work by date. A method of reporting children's progress through a folder or binder that shows children's work. Teachers may want to define the objective of the lesson and then describe how the child responded.
Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS)	An observation-based assessment tool that measures how teachers/providers interact with children to create supportive, nurturing relationships, enhance learning, and provide instruction.
Coach	A person who develops positive relationships with the program director and staff, visits the program on a regular basis, and works with the program to implement strategies to achieve and maintain quality.
Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals	The knowledge and skills that early childhood professionals need to have to work most effectively with children from the ages of birth through age 8.

Curriculum	The written and implemented plan for learning experiences and activities to stimulate and enhance children's growth and learning. The curriculum includes how the appropriate materials and learning space/classroom are organized and used (both indoors and outdoors) and how the adults and children interact. The curriculum also recognizes and builds on the children's interests, and acknowledges their families' contributions and cultural backgrounds.
Developmentally Appropriate	A play-oriented learning environment and teaching strategies that are based on the widely accepted theories and research about the typical and atypical growth, development and learning of children. The learning environment should offer opportunities for age-appropriate learning experiences through active involvement with people and materials.
Developmental Screening	Children reach developmental milestones at different paces. While every child grows and develops at his/her own pace, it is important for caregivers to observe and track children's growth to make sure that it is on track with developmental milestones. The purpose is not to diagnose children with developmental delays, but rather to help professionals determine if further screening or evaluation is needed.
Early Care and Education	Services provided to children from birth through age 8.
Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)	The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale is an observation based tool designed to assess the quality of learning environments for center-based programs for preschool-kindergarten aged children, from ages 2 and ½ through 5 years.
Early Childhood Professional Record System	The online system for early childhood professionals to record training, education, and credentials. The record system is used to calculate the professional development and training points for Step Up to Quality and the Program Quality Points for Step Up to Quality.
Early Learning Guidelines	Define what children can typically be expected to know and do; and what adults can do to provide experiences and environments that support learning across the developmental and learning domains.
English Language Learners (ELL)	Children whose native language is a language other than English and who have difficulties speaking, reading, writing or understanding the English language.
Environment Rating Scale (ERS)	Observation based tools designed to assess the quality of learning environments, curriculum, and interactions within early childhood settings. The ERS will be conducted by an assigned reliable quality observer.
Environment Rating Scale Sub-Scale	The category areas that the Environment Rating Scale measures. Sub-scales of ERS are: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language and Reasoning/Listening and Talking, Activities, Interactions, Program Structures, and Parents and Staff.
Evidence-based	Educational practices that are based upon systematic reviews of the research. Evidence-based practices usually have the highest degree of proven effectiveness. Evidence-based means that the research has found the practice to be significant and reliable based upon the review of research.
Family Child Care	The Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale is an observation based

Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS)	tool designed to assess the quality of learning environments in family child care homes. The observation is conducted in a provider's home.
Formal Assessment	Use of published developmental assessments, checklists or structured observational procedures such as Teaching Strategies GOLD.
HighScope	The HighScope Educational Research Foundation is a nonprofit organization that promotes the development of children and supports educators and parents as they help children learn. HighScope has developed curriculum, and assessment instruments for early childhood programs. The Preschool Child Observation Record (COR) is High Scope's child assessment instrument.
Incentive Bonus	A financial bonus provided to early childhood care and education programs participating in Step Up to Quality. An incentive bonus is provided each time a program moves up a Step.
Individual Education Plan (IEP)	An IEP is the developmental and education plan for a child from age 3 to age 21 with disabilities. The IEP describes how the child learns, and what teachers and service providers will do to help the child learn more effectively.
Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)	An IFSP is the developmental and education plan for a child age birth to three who has developmental delays. The plan includes an assessment of the child's present level of development, a statement of goals, and support services that will be put in place to achieve those goals.
Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale	The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised is an observation based tool designed to assess center-based programs for children from birth to 2 and ½ years of age.
Informal Assessment	Observation of children's learning using children's work, discussion with families, and notes about children's learning and activities during the course of the day.
Licensed Child Care Programs	The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services licenses child care programs across the state. The types of child care licenses include: Family Child Care Home I-Program provided in home, serving up to 8 children of mixed ages and 2 additional school age children during non-school hours. Family Child Care Home II-Program provided in home or other location. Serving up to 12 children with two providers. Child Care Center-Licensed for at least 13 children. Preschool-Program providing educational services, and no nap or no meal is provided. School-age Care-Program serving at least 13 children who are attending or have attended school.
Nutrition and Physical Activity Self- Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC)	A self-assessment developed to help early childhood care and education programs promote healthy eating and physical activity in young children. The program was developed in 2002 and has been updated over the years to address important child health issues.
Observer/Observation	Observer is the person who observes the child care or early childhood education program using one of the defined quality observation tools to determine whether the program is meeting indicators defined in those instruments. Observation is the process of having the observer come into

	classrooms to observe the learning environment, teacher/child interactions, and curriculum in action.
OEC	Nebraska Department of Education's Office of Early Childhood is responsible for all early childhood services operated by public schools and partners with DHHS to manage the Step Up To Quality Program.
Program Policies	A written program description used to guide decisions and actions within a program.
Program Practices	The specific ways that an early childhood care and education program implements its services within a classroom or home.
Quality Improvement Plan	A written action plan completed by early childhood education programs to describe what specific actions the program will take to improve quality around quality indicators.
Quality Indicator	The specific measure of quality within a quality standard area or in a quality observation based tool.
Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)	A defined method to evaluate, support and improve the level of quality in early childhood care and education settings. A QRIS includes quality standards, supports and incentives for meeting the quality standards, monitoring and accountability systems, and a rating system to help parents and the community know about program quality.
Quality Standard	The global quality areas addressed in Step Up to Quality. The Quality Standard Areas are: Program Curriculum, Learning Environment, and Interactions; Child Outcomes, Professional Development and Training; Family Engagement and Partnerships; and Administration.
Rater	A person who reviews documents, policies and procedures submitted by a program participating in Step Up to Quality to verify that the program meets quality indicators.
Reliable	A measurement that is reliable means that everyone is using the same standards to measure a skill or concept, and that the measurement instrument is consistent from one person using it to the next person using it.
Rule 11	Regulations for early childhood education programs operated through local school districts or Educational Service Units (ESUs).
School District-Approved Early Childhood Program	Early childhood education programs established by school boards or educational service units that are approved by the State Board Of Education and that comply with all program requirements defined in Rule 11.
Self-Assessment	An assessment tool that programs use (without an outside observer or coach) to determine how they are doing related to certain indicators.
Teaching Strategies GOLD	A formal child assessment tool developed by the Teaching Strategies Corporation. The formal child assessment tool uses both formal and informal assessments. Teaching Strategies GOLD is required as the child assessment instrument for all school-district approved early childhood care and education programs.
Technical Assistance	Professional who provides procedural support to programs participating in Step Up to Quality. Helps programs understand Step Up to Quality requirements, what documentation will be needed to verify quality

	indicators, what the policies and procedures are for Step Up to Quality, and how to access and use the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System.
Transition Plan	A plan that describes how to ensure that children and families have successful, positive transitions from setting to setting, including between classrooms, to a different child care setting, and to kindergarten.
Valid	A measurement that is valid means that the measuring instrument has been proven to actually measure what it says it measures.